

# Senator Kyl's Senior Bulletin

April 2005

## The Social Security crisis: Who's really at risk?

"Today, more than 45 million Americans receive Social Security benefits, and millions more are nearing retirement -- and for them the system is sound and fiscally strong. I have a message for every American who is 55 or older: Do not let anyone mislead you; for you, the Social Security system will not change in any way."

-- President Bush, State of the Union Address  
February 2, 2005

**I**t's hard to think how the President could have made it any more crystal clear that the crisis facing the Social Security system is not a threat to current and near-retirees, but rather to their children and grandchildren.

Lamentably, however, some of his political opponents in Congress and special interest groups continue to use the issue to frighten senior citizens into believing their retirement security is at risk. Because such scare tactics have been effective in the past, I suppose it's not surprising they would be resurrected. But they're still wrong.

Opinion polls show most Americans seem wise to the tactic. A Harris poll conducted in mid-February asked the open-ended question: What is the most important issue for government to address? Social Security was the top answer, ahead of the war in Iraq, health care, and a host of other important issues. More tellingly, a Gallup poll in the same timeframe found that nearly two-thirds of respondents believed President Bush's proposal to allow younger individuals the option of investing part of their FICA taxes in regulated personal accounts was a "good idea," even if it meant that Social Security's guaranteed benefits would be reduced.

As complex as the issue is, voters increasingly grasp that it boils down to some basic facts. When Social Security was founded in the 1930s, average life expectancy

was 63. Since benefits didn't start until age 65, the system was obviously sound financially. Moreover, there were about 42 workers paying taxes into the system for every one retiree drawing benefits. With life expectancy increasing and fewer babies being born, that ratio has gradually dropped to about 3-to-1 today.

Soon each retiree will be supported by only two workers, putting even more strain on the system. In just 13 years there will be less revenue coming into Social Security than payments going out to beneficiaries, and under current law, benefits must be reduced to match revenue in 2042.

As President Bush pointed out, "2018 and 2042 may seem a long way off. But those dates are not so distant, as any parent will tell you. If you have a five-year-old, you're already concerned about how you'll pay for college tuition 13 years down the road. If you've got children in their 20s, as some of us do, the idea of Social Security collapsing before they retire does not seem like a small matter."

Over the next year, the American people will have an opportunity to debate a number of different approaches to grapple with these realities. We will need to follow the same fundamental principles that guided the original creation of Social Security: providing all Americans with a supplement to their income to guarantee security and peace of mind in retirement. For today's seniors there is no problem, but for young Americans, the current system cannot meet this goal.

To foster a bipartisan discussion, President Bush has made clear that all options are open and reformers will listen to "anyone who has a good idea." No lasting solution will be easy. But we must move ahead with an open and honest discussion, free of demagoguery and scare tactics, or we will fail to meet a most basic responsibility we have to future generations.



By Jon Kyl

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# Top priorities in the 109th Congress

With the President's second inauguration now history, Congress finally gets down to business for its 109th Session. Here are some of the most pressing items we will address:

**National Security:** The need to continue to fight the war on terror will be front and center. To provide the legal tools and financial resources required, we will reauthorize the Patriot Act. We'll also pass appropriations to ensure our troops have what they need to win.

**The Economy:** Our economy continues to show robust growth, partly because of the tax cuts President Bush signed into law during his first term. These cuts are only temporary, however; should they expire, we will face a series of tax hikes totaling more than \$1.2 trillion over the next 10 years! If we are serious about promoting economic and job growth, we must lock current tax rates into place.

**Tort Reform:** Congress has attempted to reform our broken lawsuit system for several years, and we'll try again. In February, the Senate passed the Class Action Fairness Act of 2005, which limits abuse of class-action suits by a small number of plaintiffs' attorneys. This year we'll work to pass legislation that restores the fundamental fairness of the civil justice system.

**Budget Reform:** Members of Congress must write a disciplined budget that holds the line on discretionary, non-defense spending while meeting our commitments to win the war on terror, protect the homeland, and ensure economic growth.

If Congress disciplines itself by acting responsibly with Americans' tax dollars, and stays within the President's guidelines, we just might be able to meet the President's goal of cutting the deficit in half over the next four years.

**Confirming the President's Judicial Nominees:** The Senate has a responsibility to confirm (or reject) the President's judicial nominees; and this may include one or more new nominees to the U.S. Supreme Court.

It is my hope that this new Congress will see the end of the unprecedented use of the filibuster to prevent nominees from receiving up-or-down votes.

**Other priorities:** These are but a few of the priorities that await the new Congress. Other issues on the horizon include: Social Security reform (see page 1), immigration reform (see page 4), simplification of our byzantine tax code, an energy bill, education reauthorizations and improvements, health-insurance availability, implementing the intelligence reorganization passed last year, and various homeland security initiatives.

## In the spotlight: Arizona and D.C.



In December, Senator Kyl spoke with doctors from the Verde Valley Medical Center in Cottonwood about medical liability reform issues.



In March, Senator Kyl was honored by the Gila River Indian Community for his work on the Arizona Water Settlements Act at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. The new law settles longstanding tribal water rights disputes.

## Getting ready for tax season

The Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) and the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs provide complimentary help to tax payers 60 and older. Their hard work is offered hand-in-hand with the IRS to train and assist seniors in preparing their Federal Income Tax Returns. To locate the nearest convenient location, and for dates and operating hours, call toll-free at: **1-800-829-1040**



### TAX ASSISTANCE RESOURCES

*Live Telephone Assistance:*  
**1-800-829-1040**

*Assistance for the Hearing  
Impaired:*  
**1-800-829-4059**

*Tax Forms and Publications:*  
**1-800-829-0433**

*Refund Hotline:*  
**1-800-829-1954**

*Taxpayer Advocate:*  
**1-877-777-4778**

*Online Help:*  
**<http://www.irs.gov/>**

## 2005 ASCA Spelling Bee in the books

February 18, 2005 was a special day for Paul Hall, as the 89-year-old Japanese Senior Center resident captured the 2005 Arizona Senior Center Association Spelling Bee competition. Mr. Hall correctly spelled the word "instauration" for the title.

The 14th annual event took place over lunch at the Embassy Suites Hotel. A dominoes tournament also took place.

The runners-up included Don Nelson, Cliff Lathrop and Joe Feczko.

Nancy Gilliam of Senator Kyl's office judged the event and said she was impressed with the spellers. "It was a great time, as always."

## Saving a critical historical resource for Arizona and the world

Most Arizonans are familiar with the Petrified Forest National Park in the northeast part of the state. Nowhere else can you find the fossilized remains of an ancient wilderness ecosystem, with petrified tree trunks that towered over Triassic swamplands 30 million years ago.

What fewer people probably know is that the boundaries of what was originally designated a national monument nearly 100 years ago actually protect only a small portion of the historic treasures of the area.

A rock formation known as the "Chinle Escarpment" cuts across the park, and since 1906 scientists have discovered countless dinosaur fossils and other paleontological deposits there, as well as nationally significant archeolog-

ical sites like ruins and petroglyphs from the ancient Pueblo Indians.

These irreplaceable treasures face serious threats from illegal activities like the theft of petrified wood and fossils, pot hunting, and vandalism, as well as the environmental degradation caused by mineral exploration. But until recently, only about six miles of the 22-mile escarpment were within the protection of the park's boundaries. The rest amounted to a checkboard of federal, state, and private property.

Late last year, Congress passed the Petrified Forest National Park Expansion Act, which I cosponsored with Senator John McCain, to expand the park to include an additional 120,000 acres, including the eastern

and western portions of the Chinle escarpment.

I was honored to receive the National Parks Conservation Association's (NCPA) National Park Achievement Award for work on the bill; but, of course, it passed because of a collaborative effort.

The Chinle escarpment may unlock answers to profound questions about our earth's history, its changing environment, and the people who have lived here. Protecting it is not only an opportunity to provide tourists with yet another interesting reason to visit Arizona; it's also a boon to those who would advance scientific knowledge of our world.

I am proud to be involved in its expansion.

# What I heard on my latest trip to the border

It's a rare conversation in Arizona politics that goes on long without the subject turning to immigration in general and the problems at the border specifically.

Late last month, I spent some time in and around Nogales meeting with various public officials and constituents. Much of what I heard was familiar, as we in Arizona continue to struggle to get the federal government to live up to its obligation to confront what is undeniably a federal issue.

But I also heard stories of new developments, both positive and negative.

Michael Nicely, the Border Patrol chief of the Tucson Sector, told me the biggest recent change he's seen has been in the nature of activity at the border. Crossings by armed thugs and violent encounters have risen dramatically: since October of 2004, Border Patrol agents have experienced 96 assaults, compared to 56 for the same period last year. Most involved "rocking" the bombarding of patrol vehicles with stones -- but there have also been 16 vehicular assaults and 10 shootings. The violence is thought to be associated with increased drug smuggling.

On the plus side, Chief Nicely told me, control of the border is steadily improving in many ways, particularly around Nogales itself. Since October 2004, he said, the Border Patrol has apprehended more

than 150,000 illegal aliens, as well as 20 tons of marijuana and 471 pounds of cocaine in the Tucson sector alone. But he said his agents need more resources -- infrastructure, technology, personnel -- faster to do their jobs, as traffic in people and drugs moves out to more remote areas.

Ranchers I spoke with brought photographs of the enormous amount of trash left by illegal border crossers, and of the trails and cut fences on their property. The environmental impact on fragile ecosystems and endangered species is devastating. (By contrast, the Border Patrol goes to such lengths to protect the environment that their horses are given special feed containing only indigenous seeds, to make sure only native plants will germinate from the horse waste.)

Not surprisingly, the ranchers and other constituents commended the Border Patrol agents for their professionalism and hard work. They also stressed the need for more manpower, as I have repeatedly emphasized to President Bush and in legislation that would add thousands of additional agents, along with equipment and infrastructure. I've also invited my Senate colleagues - most from states that don't see the border as "their" problem -- as well as other federal agency officials to come see the situation firsthand.

The sheer volume of cross-border traffic in Nogales is overwhelm-

ing: James Tong, the Port of Entry director, told me that last year his staff processed four million vehicles, 10 million passengers, 5.5 million pedestrians and 245,000 commercial trucks.

The vast majority are, of course, perfectly legitimate, and Customs and Border Protection and the Greater Nogales and Santa Cruz Port Authority are developing a Free and Secure Trade (FAST) dedicated lane to expedite commercial traffic through the Mariposa Port. I have asked the State Department to help advance this process. But we must not sacrifice security for speed: in between all those lettuce trucks and day-shoppers, Customs agents also found more than 16 tons of marijuana, two tons of cocaine, and 123 pounds of methamphetamines.

Even more important, of course, is the need to secure the border against terrorists, who recent news reports suggest are increasingly likely to attempt to infiltrate the United States from Mexico. The day that Michael Chertoff was confirmed as the new Secretary of Homeland Security, I met with him to discuss the Arizona border. He assured me that it is a top priority and accepted my invitation to visit soon. Illegal immigration is bad enough, but it would be a tragedy if it took a terrorist attack to finally convince Washington to do what's necessary to bring the border under control.

## *How to contact Senator Jon Kyl*

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